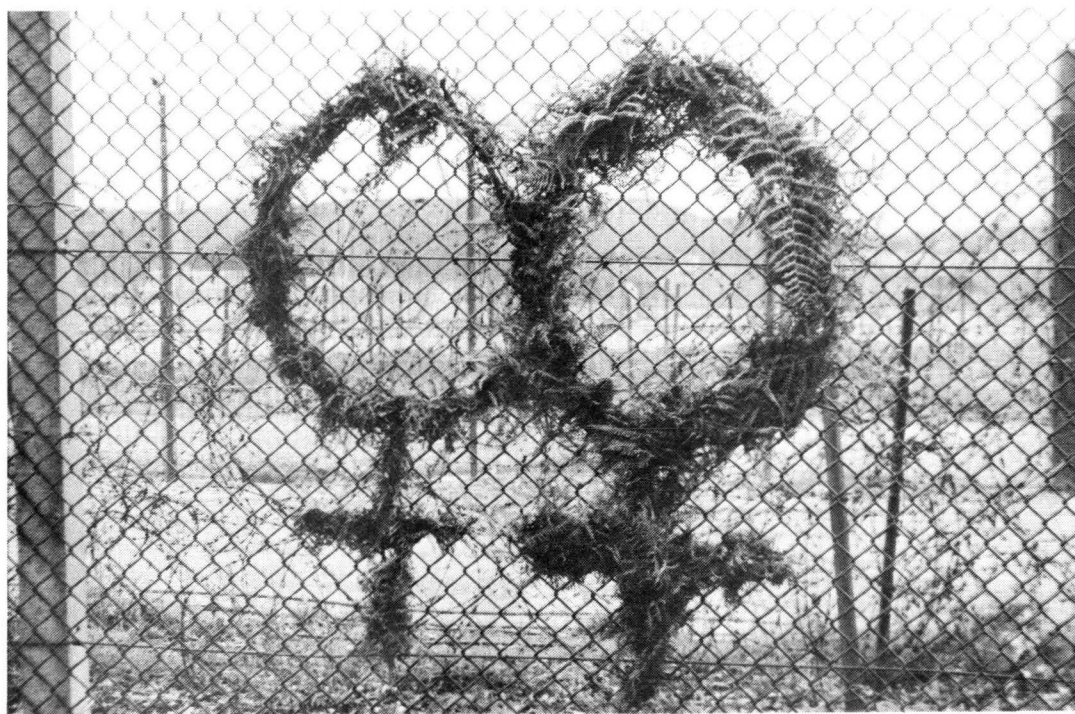


Book Reviews



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Women and Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union. Tatyana Mamonova, editor, with the assistance of Sarah Matilsky. London: Basil Blackwell, 1984.

This book is of such value to feminists and students of Soviet affairs alike, that to review it requires a great deal of presumption. *Women and Russia* is a remarkable collection of essays by Russian feminists who have taken great risks and suffered the due consequences in order to speak their minds. The result is a dramatic exposé of the difficult lot of the Soviet Woman and a thorough condemnation of the political system which rules her, one in which patriarchy appears to be as firmly entrenched as ever despite the Communist Party's self-congratulatory declarations of equality between the sexes. The authors shed light on aspects of Soviet life rarely if ever explored by Western commentators or Soviet dissidents, while maintaining a basic faith in the validity of socialism, and an optimistic, if naive goal of an international feminist movement that can change the world for the better.

The work was brought to publication by Tatyana Mamonova, an artist and poet who, six years ago, got together with a group of Russian women and put out a *samizdat* (underground) Almanac, *Woman and Russia*. In the words of Robin Morgan's foreword to the work, these women, "knowing virtually nothing about the Women's Movement in the rest of the world, reinvented feminism." (p. ix) Despite threats and harassment from the KGB, the group published a second, and later, a third issue. Finally, in 1980, Mamonova and three other women were expelled from the Soviet Union on accusations of treason, but managed somehow to bring their works to the West.

Russian feminism has its roots in the industrialization of the early twentieth century, and women such as Larisa Reisner and Alexandra Kollantai played an active role in the Revolution in the struggle for women's rights. Despite their efforts, Bolshevik theory and practice in the area of women's equality became two separate things. It is almost a cliché to say that Soviet women have two jobs: one in the workplace, and one at home. The extra work women do is time-consuming and arduous and, we are told, deters women from playing a more active political role. But what this book reveals to us is the relatively primitive, appalling conditions of everyday life as a Soviet woman. Here are documented, in graphic detail, the poor quality of health care, child care,

abortion and maternity facilities. Vera Golubeva writes of the difficulties posed by the unavailability of adequate food and consumer goods, particularly in the more remote areas of the country. Valentina Dobrokhota writes of the burden of manual labour, much of which is done by women in the Soviet Union. Galina Grigoreva and Svetlana Sonova write about the impediments to career advancement suffered by women in academic fields.

In a different vein, the contributors reveal a sinister underworld that exists for women living on the fringes of society, such as the *bomzhi* (vagrants). There is an article about Soviet drug addicts and one about women in prison. There are articles showing the secret life of Soviet lesbians, whose preferences are considered tantamount to mental illness. There is also a riveting verbatim transcript of a confrontation Mamonova had with the KGB, which illustrates her courage and intelligence even when dealing with the state's most feared organization.

Other essays in the volume serve not so much the purpose of criticism, but of introspection. One of the most interesting pieces is Ekaterina Alexandrova's "Why Soviet Women Want to get Married," which examines the social factors that lead Russian girls to see romance as their foremost goal in life, despite the high price paid by a Soviet wife. The heritage of women's roles and matriarchal legends of the native people of Siberia, Armenia and Central Asia are examined by Z. Sinanef, Tsovinar Tsovinian and O. Kurbangaeva respectively. Kurbangaeva discusses the effects of Islam on the position of women in Soviet Central Asia. Finally, there are short stories, poetry and essays examining the relationships between women in Russia.

The authors are hesitant and vague when it comes to espousing a definite plan of action for the future or in enunciating an exact political position. However, no one seems prepared to call for an end to socialism. Mamonova praises Lenin as well as the early Russian feminists, and supports the human-rights campaign of the prominent Soviet physicist and dissident Andrei Sakharov. However, she rejects the Russian Orthodox Church, which she claims is one of the bulwarks of patriarchy. Interestingly, the conservative chauvinism of many male dissidents and emigrés is also discussed as a factor impeding the progress of Russian women. The writers clearly admire the gains made as well as the freedoms enjoyed by Western feminists, and envisage a world union of women that will one day finally give women a voice in running world affairs. Mamonova considers this to be inevitable, if the world is to survive, as women, who are creators, can put a stop to nuclear war.

The last two essays in the volume deal with the issue of peace, and are of special interest. Ekaterina Alexandrova, in "We Need Peace and We Need the World," points out that Soviet militarism is justified by the government by the perpetuation of the idea that the Soviet Union is surrounded by hostile enemies ready to invade. Such propaganda is effective in a population that vividly remembers the horrors of the last war. Alexandrova claims that most Soviet people have no idea what a third world war would be like, and the terrifying prospect of one is dangled over their heads in an effort to make them satisfied with what they have now. This, she writes, has become a vicious circle in recent years, as anti-imperialist propaganda has been stepped up while the standard of living has declined. The hold that these ideas have over the people is exacerbated by the observation that in Russia militarism and xenophobia have always been linked with patriotism. Echoing the sentiments of the nineteenth-century Russian Westernizers, Tatyana Mamonova concludes that Soviets can learn from the encouraging example of the Western feminist and peace movements, and from education.

Women and Russia, Mamonova writes, was the expression of a group of women who wanted freedom, who wanted peace, and who wanted to love. The result is one of the most sweeping and human indictments of Soviet life written to date. These writings do not need to resort to tirades or hyperbole; the book is plainly written, with a clear sense of rationality and sensitivity, and gives one a strong impression of what it is like to live an everyday life as a Soviet woman. It portrays the sad irony of life in a state where women show so much strength and yet are delegated so little power or esteem.

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Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915-1965. Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims. Oxford England: Alden Press, 1980 Paperback pp. 255. (Reissue of 1965 edition entitled **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915-1965: A Record of Fifty Years' Work**)

Scholars of twentieth century peace movements, particularly those who recognize the crucial role of women in peace work since the World War I era, will welcome the 1980 reissue of Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims' monograph, *Pioneers for Peace*. Bussey and Tims represent the best of the tradition of activist-scholars. Life-long active members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

(WILPF) themselves, their study is carefully researched, well written, and imbued with insights gained from first-hand knowledge of events and people.

The WILPF was born in the midst of war. On April 28, 1915, 1,136 women from 12 countries representing 150 organizations met at The Hague, Holland, to consider how to end the current world conflict and prevent future wars. They were not to meet as an association again until 1919, but at this first meeting the participants adopted 20 resolutions under six categories: Women and War; Action towards Peace; Principles of a Permanent Peace; International Cooperation; Education of Children; and Action to be Taken. They constituted themselves as the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace with Jane Addams (USA) as President and Aletta Jacobs (Holland) and Rosika Schwimmer (Hungary/USA) as Vice-Presidents. Consistent with the goal of early termination of the war, this first International Congress of Women proposed that neutral countries meet immediately to offer their services as mediators amongst the warring nations. This suggestion for "continuous mediation," developed by a Canadian-born professor at the University of Wisconsin, Julia Grace Wales, was carried personally to the heads of fourteen different countries by a delegation of Congress members during May and June 1915. The women at The Hague Conference had wasted no time in implementing concrete proposals for peace.

At the end of World War I, the women of the 1915 International Committee, many of whom had been actively working in their national committees (or sections) during the war, met again in Zurich, Switzerland, in May 1919. At this assemblage women from 16 countries approved a constitution for what was now the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Here members reiterated the main goal of the 1915 Congress, identification of the causes of war in order to prevent war. Because of limited resources, WILPF, which was pacifist in orientation without being of the "absolutist" pacifist persuasion, chose to work to abolish war through special tasks identified by Bussey and Tims as "the study of political and economic issues; objective fact-finding; personal reconciliation; and the formulation of just and humane policies." (p. 35)

While never a mass movement, WILPF, in the interwar years, established itself as an innovative, creative force in the international peace movement. It organized additional national sections in Europe, Latin America, and the Near and Far East, and helped to set up the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organizations. (In 1947, through WILPF leadership, the Inter-American Federation of Women